

Hole in One by yukiawison

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Summary:

They're nervous, so the first date doesn't go exactly to plan.

(The boys play mini golf and are awkward high schoolers.)

Hole in One

Mike was making him nervous. He'd been tapping on the steering wheel ever since he picked him up. When Will's mom had waved from the porch, he'd just hunched his shoulders and smiled awkwardly. He didn't turn on the radio until Will prompted, after they'd sat in uncharacteristic silence for a stifling minute or two.

And Will Byers was already plenty nervous. In truth the hardest part was over (or so he hoped). It had only taken him 5 years to tell his best friend how he felt. And even then it had come out in a horrible mess of stuttering and fear and looking anywhere but Mike's eyes. Because if his eyes were cold Will would fall apart in front of him.

But they weren't cold. Actually, Mike hugged him when he told him that he liked him more than friends were supposed to like each other and that he was sorry if he was making things weird but that the feeling was clawing and beating at his chest too violently to ignore anymore. When Mike said he thought he felt the same Will had cried. It was relief or happiness or fear of what came next. But it was freeing.

"Did Jane come over like she said she would?" Will asked, desperate for some kind of small talk.

Mike's lips quirked up fractionally and he glanced over at Will for a second. "You know El keeps her promises."

Jane Hopper was one of the few aware of their realization of mutual feelings. Mike's parents didn't have a clue (as per usual), as of now Will's mom and brother thought any one on one time between the two was a purely friend thing, and they'd held off on saying anything to the rest of the party until they were sure what they had and how best to explain it.

Mike was one of the few who still called Jane El. It seemed a relic of a time where hands gripped too tightly on weapons and his throat was raw from screaming. Will wasn't sure if he liked the nickname for calling back to a time where they'd fought hardest and needed each other most or if he hated it for the dark pieces of Jane's life it alluded

to.

"She told me not to mess this up," Mike said, eyes catching Will's again briefly before he turned back to the road.

"Oh, okay," he replied. He imagined her lecture, sitting him down and speaking in the stern, calculated voice she usually reserved for enemies. Jane was a little protective of Will. Of course she loved them both (and was maybe more attached to Mike than she'd ever be to him) but Jane was always there when someone tried to mess with Will. She wanted to protect him from things he didn't even need protection from.

They fell silent again.

In high school Will Byers was coming into himself. Sure, he got shoved into his fair share of lockers and called nasty things that made him hide in the bathroom stalls and try to catch his breath, but mostly he'd begun taking everything that made him who he was and intensifying it tenfold without fear of judgement.

Hence, he'd taken nearly every art class offered and spent all the after school time he was allotted making things in the art room. He'd started painting his nails even though he got weird looks for it, and making mix tapes of his favorite music to give to the party and Jonathan.

He stopped apologizing for every nightmare and bout of tears and started saying the things he needed to say instead of bottling his emotions up until they cramped and twisted and burned in him like the mind flayer.

And one of those things that needed to be said was that he was head over heels for Mike Wheeler.

Mike flicked on the turn signal and pulled into the mall's parking lot. As they'd grown up it began to replace the arcade as the universal hangout spot. Will and Dustin would read comics and share a basket of fries in the food court. He'd sit beside Max outside a dressing room as Jane modeled a number of dresses and contemplated Max's suggestion that she add a leather jacket to every outfit she tried on.

The six of them had spent far too much time wandering from shop to shop and gossiping about assholes at school or trying to agree on a movie for their weekly movie night.

The mall was also the go to place for dates. Which was why, unless Mike's stony silence meant Will was horribly mistaken, they were here now. It was a date. Their first date, to be precise.

Mike parked and turned off the car. He finally looked over at Will and the look on his face was so anxious and expectant that Will couldn't take it anymore.

"Mike, what's wrong? He asked.

Mike jumped and Will immediately felt bad.

"If you don't want to do this please just tell me," he said quietly. Deep down he knew that this was too good to be true. Mike Wheeler couldn't like him the way Will hoped he would.

"No!" Suddenly Mike was too loud and too close. "No, Will it's not that. I'm just...I'm sorry."

Will looked down at his lap. This wasn't happening the way it was supposed to. "You don't have to lie to make me feel better."

"I'm not lying Will." Mike put a hand on his shoulder and Will looked up.

"I'm nervous," Mike muttered after a moment. "I don't know why I'm so damn nervous."

Will relaxed a fraction. Maybe he could buy that all this weirdness was just awkward freaking out. Doubt crept at the back of his head like it always did. Knife twisting thoughts weren't unusual for Will Byers. Sometimes, before he closed his eyes at night, his brain told him that he should've stayed stuck in the Upside Down, that everything would be easier for everyone if he'd just let it get him.

"I'm nervous too," he said. "But it's just me. It doesn't have to be that different from hanging out any other time."

"Yeah but..." Mike started, and then stopped. It was different. They both knew it. Saying it wasn't didn't change a thing. Mike's eyebrows furrowed and he looked at Will with determination he usually reserved for D&D or saving the entirety of Hawkins.

"Okay," Mike said at last. "Let's do this."

Will had been to the indoor mini golf place twice before. The first time had been with his mom and Jonathan to celebrate Jonathan getting into NYU. The neon signs and and simple but ridiculous holes were just what the night needed. The whole place was glow in the dark (part of the appeal of mini golfing indoors) but Jonathan brought his camera anyway, and snapped poorly lit shots of Will, whose Star Wars t-shirt glowed as much as the plaster hippo he was trying to hit the ball into. The second time the whole party had gone and Jane had been banned from the establishment for bending a mini golf club (with her mind, though the employee who kicked them out hadn't seen that part.) Jane wasn't much of a golfer.

Will liked how the neon lit up the dark. He'd never been great in the dark (he went to bed with his curtains open to the moonlight and woke up before his alarm when the sunlight came in) but there things felt more comfortable.

Mike's teeth glowed when he smiled, and Will followed him to the counter to buy their games.

"Um." He looked around cautiously. "Two please," he said to the cashier with intent, slapping down a few crumpled bills. He was paying for the both of them, which Will guessed was the final step in making this a true date.

They both stared at the employee with held breath. She just continued chewing the wad of gum in her mouth and counted the money with a bored expression. Success.

"Thanks Mike. I'll get it next time."

"Next time," Mike repeated, looking over at him.

Will blinked. Yeah, he'd already planned their next date (milkshakes

at the diner and a drive out to where you could really see the stars) but Mike didn't need to know that yet.

"Um, yeah. If that's alright with you."

"Yeah," he replied, grinning like a dope. "It's alright with me."

Will was better at mini golf than Mike. He was better at concentrating and not getting inordinately frustrated when things didn't go to plan. Mike looked like he was 13 again when he was frustrated: freckled nose crinkling, eyes rolled in the brand of sass his mother used to tell him off for, and arms crossed tightly over his chest.

"You must be cheating," he said, shaking his head as he penciled numbers into their scorecard. "I don't know how but you must be cheating."

Will laughed as he pulled Mike over to the last hole. They had to hit their balls up an impossibly steep incline into a slide that returned them to the proprietors of Hawkins Glow Golf. After a few unsuccessful attempts Mike gave up and irritably returned his ball to the front counter.

"It's all you Will," he said now, crouching down to look intently at the plasticky grass. "I believe in you."

His tone was light and joking. By all accounts the statement shouldn't have made Will's heart flip the way it did. He'd said similar things, before he knew how Will felt, and they'd have sleepovers in Mike's basement. Gangly teenage limbs tangled together on the couch as they watched late night sitcom reruns. Mike would laugh and press his shoulder close to Will's and in the commercial breaks sometimes he'd look over at him in soft, unguarded ways that were almost too much all on their own.

"Do you still think about it?" He asked once. It was a dumb question. A question he already knew the answer to.

"Of course I do, Mike." I don't think I'll ever feel truly safe again. He didn't say. Close, maybe. With you sometimes I'm close.

"I think you're the bravest, out of any of us," he'd said matter of factly, eyes straying to a Reese's commercial on the screen. They'd turned the volume down so they wouldn't wake Mike's parents.

"What do you mean?" He'd asked, trying to sound casual but only succeeding in whispering like it was some sort of secret. "I'm not...I mean I was never..."

"Yeah you were. You still are." He hardly looked away from the TV. "Don't try to minimize it. You get put through hell and you stay a great person. That's really something."

"Are you ready Will?" Mike asked him now. He nodded, mechanically, shaking off the memory. He lined up his putter and sucked in a breath. If Hawkins High had a mini golf team he'd probably be a star player, imagine that: Will Byers in a letterman jacket.

He planted his feet firmly and swung, not too much power, just enough. The ball skittered up the incline and hit the slide at just the right speed and angle. They watched as it rolled into the hole and grinned at each other when the accompanying bell dinged.

Then his arms were around Mike's neck, golf club abandoned in a hug that brought Will's face too close to Mike's. His lips brushed his cheek before Mike drew back. Will let go.

"Crap," Mike said. He looked around wildly. "I think I saw some guys from school earlier. We can't just..." He looked around again.

"We can't just what, Mike?" The euphoria of the moment faded into a confused and angry shame. "It was just a hug."

"It was almost more than a hug," Mike whispered back. He looked nervous, panicked even. Will liked the Mike Wheeler of quiet basements and frustrated putting attempts better than the panicked, jumpy one in front of him. What's worse, this Mike Wheeler made him angry.

"What did you take me here for Mike?" He said sharply. "If I can't even hug you."

"Will, keep your voice down."

"Why should I?" Anger and frustration bubbled up inside of him. What was the use of being brave if the person you wanted to be brave for couldn't do the same for you.

"Will, maybe we should..."

Will handed him the golf club roughly.

"Go, right I know. We should go someplace where no one can see you here with me." His breath was coming quick now. The glow in the dark shapes were glowing too brightly in his vision, distorting in a mockery of his pathetic freak out. Zombie boy can't even get a date right.

"Will, that's not it. You know that's not it..."

"I don't know anything Mike," he said.

"It was different with El," Mike looked down. "I never felt..."

"If you'd rather be here with her then fine. Although she's banned from this place so you couldn't come here anyway."

"Will, would you listen to me for one second."

"If you guys are done can you like, move?"

The two of them whipped their heads around to see an irritated looking guy staring at them.

"Well?" He said, with an accompanying raising of eyebrows.

"Yeah," Will said. Angry, defeated. "I'll move."

Mike didn't register how profoundly he'd fucked up until Will wasn't mini-golfing with him anymore.

He stood there, for a moment or two, just holding the abandoned putter shamefully as the man waiting for him to step aside sighed

with increasing annoyance.

El was going to kill him. He couldn't go to her like this and say that he'd done the one thing she told him not to: screw it up.

Mike Wheeler wasn't sure he was cut out to date Will Byers. He wasn't sure he was cut out to date anyone.

He really liked Will. Of course he did. How could he not fall for his best friend when his best friend was so smart and strong and creative and could turn any bad day around with a smile or a meaningful glance? How could he not fall for the kid who'd been to hell and back and still gave a shit about whether or not Mike Wheeler remembered to eat lunch?

But it was different and scary to be in the place between zero and one. It was scary to look over your shoulder before you moved to hold hands. It was scary to piece together how you were going to tell whoever you decided to tell. And when Mike Wheeler got scared he got paranoid and irrational and, apparently, incredibly stupid.

He started by buying him a soft pretzel: cinnamon sugar, his favorite. He found Will at a corner table in the food court.

"I would've left but you're my ride," he said harshly, not looking up when Mike took the seat across from him.

"I got you a pretzel," he started because he didn't know what to say. He held out the aforementioned pretzel.

Will glanced up at him but didn't take it.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I am. I didn't want it to go like that."

"Well, I didn't either." He met his eyes and it was almost worse than being ignored because he looked hurt and angry.

"It's just...I um, I like you and I don't know what I'm doing." Mike ran his free hand through his hair nervously.

"Neither do I," Will said. "But I thought we could go on a date without tiptoeing all over the place. I didn't think you'd freak out on

me.”

It sounded accusatory. Will’s expression was too passionate and open. Mike didn’t know what to do with that yet. He was used to keeping things on the inside.

“I didn’t either. I’m sorry.”

“No one’s stopping you from going back to El, or some other girl it’s easier to date.”

Mike blinked, taken aback.

“I don’t like El like that anymore. You know that.”

Will huffed out a frustrated breath. “Yeah, fine, I know that but I still get worried you’ll...”

Mike was still putting together the rest of a thought and ended up interrupting him. “And you could date some girl too, right? It’d be easier than going with a mess like me.”

“Wait, what?” Will blinked. His expression complicated the way it did when he was thinking through all the potential ramifications of a roll during a D&D campaign. “I can’t date a girl. I don’t like girls the way you like girls.”

“Well...” Mike was grasping at something that, it occurred to him, he hadn’t articulated before. “Doesn’t everyone like both guys and girls? At least a little bit? And you’re just not supposed to talk about it if you like someone who, y’know...if you like someone in a gay way?”

“No, Mike. That’s called being bisexual. Not everyone is bisexual.”

“Oh,” Mike felt his face heat up. “Oh, I didn’t...”

“Mike.”

Mike looked at him. He was taking the pretzel now. His expression looked a little softer than before.

“If you’re not ready, we don’t have to do anything,” he said, voice

low and hesitant, but as sincere as ever.

“No! It’s not that. Well maybe today it is that because I guess I don’t know anything about how sexuality works and I kind of feel like my life is a lie just a little bit but no!” He stopped, aware of his rambling. Usually he knew the right things to say around Will. “You didn’t let me finish my sentence earlier.”

“What sentence?”

“It’s different than with El because I never felt like it was as special as this is,” he gestured between them. “El and I are best friends. You and I are best friends and a little more. And that scares me.”

This time Will was the one looking pink. “Okay,” he said. “It scares me too. But we have to be in this together. And you have to trust me. And tell me if you’re not okay with going out like this.”

“I know. You’re right. I’m sorry I can’t mini golf with you like a normal person.”

“We’re never going to be normal people.”

Mike laughed, and it felt like all the tension built up in his chest was being released. He remembered why he’d always wanted to keep Will Byers safe, why he’d always been proud and grateful and lucky to be his friend. Will Byers was honest. And when people didn’t like him for ignorant or petty or fucked up reasons he didn’t back down. He wasn’t normal, and he’d figured out sometime (when Mike wasn’t looking) that that wasn’t something to apologize for. He was the kind of person Mike wanted to be brave for.

“Do you wanna go home?” Will asked. “We could watch a movie at my house?”

“Okay. I’m sorry.”

“I forgive you.”

He was going to be brave.

Mike Wheeler hesitated a few moments after he turned off the car. Will could see that his kitchen light was on from their spot in the driveway. His mom was probably cleaning up the dishes and pretending she wasn't waiting up on him. She didn't know this was a date (yet.) Will was going to tell her once he was sure there was something worth telling. He looked over at Mike, frozen with his hands on the wheel.

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah," he said, dazed.

It seemed a very Mike Wheeler thing to assume that everyone else was as taken with every gender as he was. It was almost endearing, Will thought, if it hadn't fostered this odd trance of sexual confusion. He couldn't really blame him.

"Do you wanna go in?" He was still trying to wrap his head around the thing Mike had said about him being different and special.

Mike nodded and they got out of the car. It was dark now, stars bright overhead and grass damp beneath their feet. Mike didn't move so Will walked over to his side of the car and faced him.

"It's okay if you want to go home Mike," he said quietly. "It's late."

"It's dark," Mike said cryptically, looking around.

"Yeah," Will said.

Mike ran a hand through his hair and hunched over slightly. "Is it okay if I kiss you?" He whispered.

"You don't have to if you're not ready."

"I want to. Do you want to?"

He brain was shouting it but he whispered. "Yes."

And then Mike was kissing him. It was soft and short and still felt like kind of a secret. It still felt new and scary but also warm and hopeful and important. He pulled away and looked at Mike. His eyelashes

fluttered and his freckles were bathed in blue and gold up close.

“Was that okay?” Mike asked.

“Hole in one,” Will said, just so he could hear Mike laugh again.

“I won’t do something worth yelling at me for next time, okay?” Mike said.

“Next time?” Will was smiling.

“Yeah, next time.”

Author's Note:

Hiya, it has been too long. Hope you like this.